



It's Wednesday, April 1, 2020. In today's issue: Behind the scenes at the Nebraska History Museum (video); 1918 flu pandemic and winter isolation; take the Nebraska History Challenge; In Memoriam: Chuck Trimble; Heritage Hero Awards; Active Collections receives book award; and a new Grace Abbott video.

We're still here for you

History Nebraska sites are closed to the public, and in recent weeks HN staff have begun working from home. But our work goes on, and we have lots of good material to share with you... such as this new video:



Though you can't visit the *Votes for Women* exhibit at the Nebraska History Museum right now, Museum Registrar Jordan Miller takes you behind the scenes, answering common questions about items in museum exhibits.

What if you haven't seen the rest of the exhibit yet? It'll be up through the end of 2020, but in the

[suffrage flag](#) that Jordan talks about, see other [Nebraska suffrage photos and objects](#), see how History Nebraska's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center [restored suffrage artifacts](#) before the exhibit, and –to see what the suffragists were up against—read sensationalist [anti-suffrage propaganda](#) from our collections. And there's plenty more at our [Women's History Month Resources](#) page.

And don't forget our *Votes for Women* special publication, sold [here](#).

We're working on new digital content on a variety of topics. We'll keep you informed via social media and these emails.

Did these people know they were living through history?



Of course, we're all living through history all the time. But certain times are more memorable. Three weeks ago (it feels a lot longer than that!) we blogged about the [1918 flu pandemic in Nebraska](#). Soon after, the *Omaha World-Herald* cited History Nebraska in an [editorial](#) on the same subject. It was beginning to dawn on everyone that we were entering a memorable historical moment ourselves.

We don't know what future historians will say about this year's pandemic, but we can guess that the University of Nebraska Medical Center will figure prominently in the story. If you missed it, be sure to read *Esquire*'s vivid March 15 [profile](#) of some of the people of UNMC.

Meanwhile, for many of us...



This sleigh belonged to Pierce County settler Baltz Fuelberth. During the legendary winter of 1949, Baltz's grandson Alton remodeled the sleigh and used it to haul cream and eggs to Osmond and bring back groceries and mail.

A hard winter meant isolation for farm families. Maxine Kessinger recalled the brutal winter of 1936, when she was a 22-year-old farm wife and mother of three, living seven miles from Rosalie:

"Every road, even highways were drifted shut for weeks. The scoop shovel was the only equipment to open the roads. Some never opened until the Spring thaws came and melted the snow. The Kinning Store, a mile east of us, ran out of supplies, as no trucks could get through. Sometimes, several neighbors joined forces and with team and bobsled going across fields, cutting fences to make it to town for needed supplies such as groceries, cold or flu remedies, maybe a little coal to enhance the supply of green wood we were trying to burn – and of course they would bring the mail. Sometimes a two-week bundle had accumulated as the rural mail carrier couldn't even get out of the city limits."

What did those people do without the internet and social media?

The Kessingers didn't have electricity, and couldn't afford a battery-powered radio. Eventually they would have a stack of Nebraska History magazines (Maxine Kessinger became a longtime member), but that was still in the future.

Whatever hardships you're currently facing, dear reader, lack of media probably isn't one of them.



Our [“Polio Punch” blog](#) and video (about a 1962 vaccination campaign) has become popular again.

The **Nebraska History Challenge** is an ongoing community event on our Facebook page. We post a photo of an object or a historic photo and include a challenge related to them. We’re posting one every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. [This post explains what's going on](#). And [here’s the first challenge](#).

(Don’t do Facebook? You don’t need to sign in to view our posts. If a pop-up window covers your screen with “See more of History Nebraska on Facebook,” just click “Not Now” at the bottom of the window.)

Also on Facebook:

- Where in Nebraska are these men [digging a cave in a cliff](#)? (Or on [Instagram](#) if you prefer.)
- [Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte](#) was the first Native American to earn a medical degree.
- Here’s a real [jerkwater town](#).

- Our response to hashtag [#LoseYourJobIn4Words](#).
- We couldn't decide whether to post a photo or a [sod house or a post office](#).

In Memoriam: Chuck Trimble



History Nebraska lost one of its most respected leaders on March 2 when former Board of Trustees President Charles “Chuck” Trimble died at age 84. Trimble led this organization out of a troubled period, and later served as president of the John G. Neihardt Foundation.

But that’s only part of the story of his remarkable life. Paul Hammel of the *Omaha World-Herald* sketches Trimble’s life as a Native American leader, journalist, advocate, and mentor. [Keep reading](#).



HN's trustees have been honoring selected Nebraskans with History Nebraska's "Heritage Hero" award. Board member Eileen Wirth tells the story. [Keep reading.](#)

New Grace Abbott video from PBS *American Masters*



In the space where we normally promote events, we leave you with this inspiring video.

Grand Island's Grace Abbott was a suffragist and the daughter of suffragists. What happens when a talented young woman grows up believing that she has the power to make a difference?

Abbott's story is part of the [UNLADYLIKE2020](#) project. The nine-minute video tells her story through rare archival imagery, captivating original artwork and animation, and interviews.



This email was written by David Bristow, Editor, and Josh Lottman, history.nebraska.gov
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New blog post linked from this newsletter:

https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/1918-flu-pandemic-nebraska?utm_source=History+Nebraska+Members%2C+Volunteers%2C+Etc.&utm_campaign=b54e581133-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_31_02_05&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d65f94cd5a-b54e581133-

The 1918 Flu Pandemic in Nebraska



Photo: Men wearing surgical masks in Shelby, Nebraska, December 8, 1918. History Nebraska RG2017.PH

A new and deadly flu strain hit the US early in 1918 and greatly intensified by September. It was part of a global pandemic. How did Nebraskans respond?

The “Spanish Flu”

People called it the Spanish Flu because of its supposed place of origin. Symptoms included high fever, cough, dizziness, and heavy perspiration. Frequently bronchial pneumonia developed, with death following in a high percentage of such cases. This strain of flu was unusual in that it was deadliest to healthy young adults.

The virus had been spreading for months, but the growing number of cases was underreported due to wartime censorship. During World War I the United States and many other countries censored bad news so as not to encourage their enemies. Later it was found that the so-called Spanish Flu didn’t originate in Spain. It’s just that Spain was neutral in the war and didn’t censor press reports of the illness.

The flu reached Nebraska by October. Red Cloud reported two flu deaths on October 2. Omaha reported its first case the next day. Scottsbluff reported its first cases on the 15th.

Closings and Quarantines

On October 7 the state ordered the closing of all “schools, churches, places of entertainment or public congregation, pool halls and other places of amusement.” Mail carriers continued on their rounds, but wore white face masks for protection.

Quarantine rules were issued for affected homes. All residents of a house who had been in contact with a diseased person had to remain in the house until the quarantine was lifted. Only a doctor or nurse was permitted to enter or leave the house while the quarantine was in effect, though medical professionals were in short supply. Necessary supplies could be brought to the house and left outside the door. Soiled clothes could be sent to the laundry if placed in a package covered with paper.

In a 2015 doctoral dissertation for the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Kristin Watkins examined the history of the pandemic in selected smaller Nebraska communities (Wayne, Red Cloud, Anselmo, Valentine, Scottsbluff, and Gering) and surrounding rural areas.

“It is clear that rural location did not provide protection from the virus,” Watkins writes. One lesson, she concluded, was that rural communities should not be lulled into a false sense of security by their geographical isolation.

In 1918 many Nebraska communities were still relatively new. In some, a lack of “basic services like supportive health care may have led to more deaths in counties lacking infrastructure such as hospitals, as was the case in both Cherry and Scottsbluff counties.”

In Lincoln and Omaha, “crowding and travel, as well as non-compliance with the ban on public gatherings, allowed the disease to reach out-of-control proportions. In rural areas, the motivators of community action were different, and non-compliance usually entailed local politicians trying to break quarantine to pursue their campaigns, with residents protesting and sticking to the quarantine.” To the extent that communities used them, measures such as “social distancing” and quarantines seemed to reduce the spread of the virus.

Medical treatment was primitive by today's standards. There were no flu vaccines or antiviral medications, no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections. Even the flu virus itself was as yet undiscovered by science.

War Ends, Santa Arrested

The statewide ban on public gatherings was lifted on November 1, but the flu continued. An armistice ended World War I on November 11, but victory celebrations were limited in many towns. Valentine, for example, didn't lift its local ban on public gatherings until November 29, and the University of Nebraska did not resume classes until after Thanksgiving.

There was almost nothing of a holiday season that year. No Christmas events or entertainments were held, and Nebraska merchants sustained severe losses from the slump in trade during the last six weeks of the year. In Gering, a department store arranged for a visit by Santa Claus on December 2—but hundreds of children were shocked when police arrested both Santa and the store owner for violating a local ban.

Nationwide, the epidemic was still claiming thousands of victims by mid-January 1919, but in Nebraska the worst was over.

Omaha alone saw 974 deaths between October 5 and December 31. The state's overall death toll was variously reported between 2,800 to 7,500 people—a broad range because Nebraska's reporting was so woefully incomplete. Medical professionals gave various reasons for this. Many said that the large number of patients left them little time to keep good records. Federal officials considered Nebraska's numbers so inaccurate that they omitted them when calculating the nation's total infection rate and mortality.

Globally, World War I killed 15 to 19 million people, military and civilian (including 751 Nebraska soldiers). The influenza pandemic proved far deadlier, taking somewhere between 50 and 100 million human lives.

Adapted from “Flu Epidemic, 1918,” Nebraska Timeline column, Nebraska State Historical Society (aka History Nebraska), November 1999.

Additional sources:

Kristin A. Watkins, “It Came Across the Plains: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Rural Nebraska,” PhD. Diss., University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, 2015.

“The 1918 Flu Pandemic: Why It Matters 100 Years Later,” Public Health Matters Blog, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 14, 2018.

<https://blogs.cdc.gov/publichealthmatters/2018/05/1918-flu/>

Categories:

influenza, World War I

<https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/hns-heritage-hero-awards-2019>

HN's Heritage Hero Awards for 2019



Above: Bruce Richman with HN board member Kim Elder.

By Eileen Wirth, History Nebraska Board of Trustees

Bruce V. Richman arrived at Buffalo Bill Ranch in North Platte wearing his Buffalo Bill gear, thinking he would be doing a presentation for a school group as he has regularly for the past 20 years.

But on this pleasant fall day, a rider on a black horse galloped to the house firing his six shooter and yelling at Buffalo Bill to get on the porch for an award. Huh?

History Nebraska Board Member Kim Elder of Paxton, leader of the “school group,” surprised Richman by presenting him with a Heritage Hero pin and certificate recognizing his many years of volunteer work for the ranch.

Richman is one of 53 recipients of History Nebraska’s new award honoring the contributions of grassroots volunteers who work for local historical groups and promote the state’s history. Recipients, who are nominated by their local groups, come from 44 organizations across the state. They include a number of couples and members of the Franklin County History Society Board.

A look at some typical recipients illustrates the contributions they have made.

Some are museum docents like Jean Johnson, a retired teacher who has developed programs for Omaha’s Durham Museum and Ken Tracy who plays “Wagon Master Broken Hand Fitzpatrick” at Kearney’s Archway. Others run major events like Jan Schliefert of Wahoo who annually organizes Wahoo’s Christmas on the Prairie celebration.

The Robert Henri Museum and Art Gallery of Cozad recognized Tammy and Larry Paulsen for their work to build the museum’s collection of this important artist’s paintings and sketches. Omaha’s Trinity Episcopal Cathedral surprised Mary Dana Loring (who is well over 90) on a snowy Sunday before Christmas by celebrating her founding of the cathedral’s historical society.

One of the most moving awards went to Rosalie McKnight of the Custer County Historical Society in Broken Bow who gives tours of her museum five days a week, six during the summer, and answers questions from the public at a research center in her basement. She even kept the museum running when her daughter was undergoing chemotherapy.

History Nebraska Board President Lance Bristol of Ansley, who presented McKnight’s award, called the program “extremely successful.”

“It takes History Nebraska to places throughout greater Nebraska where we have never been and gives local history organizations a vehicle to recognize their very dedicated volunteers,” said Bristol. “This is a chance for History Nebraska to say congratulations to grassroots volunteers. We tell them that the state thanks you.”

Bristol said History Nebraska will again invite all Nebraska local history and museum groups to nominate their winners. Letters explaining what to do, how to do it and deadlines for submissions will be mailed in mid-summer.

“This is not a competition. Everyone nominated by a local museum or historical society wins,” he said. History Nebraska representatives present the awards at events that the local groups organize and publicize.

[Here are the winners of the 2019 Heritage Hero awards.](#)



Award recipient Ken Tracy with HN board member Vickie Schaepler at the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument in Kearney.

Categories:

[awards](#)

<https://history.nebraska.gov/about/heritage-hero-awards>

Heritage Hero Awards

The Heritage Hero Award was created by the History Nebraska Board of Trustees to recognize and thank local volunteers of history organizations around the state for their time and effort in helping to share Nebraska's history. Nominations were sent in by cultural organizations from across the state.

The board will give out 42 awards to individuals and organizations dedicated to preserving and sharing their region's history. Each recipient will receive a commemorative pin and certificate presented to them by a member of the History Nebraska Board of Trustees.

The 42 recipients of the 2019 Heritage Hero Award are listed below.

2019 Heritage Hero Award Winners

Ardyth Anderson — Clay County Historical Society

Brian and Gloria Christiansen — City of Neligh

Bruce V. Richman — Buffalo Bill Ranch

Charlene Vail — Crawford Historical Society

Delores Klimek — Fort Hartsuff

Donald Deitemeyer — Hall County Historical Society

Douglas Rung — Fillmore County Historical Society

Duaine Stalder — Quad County Museum

Dwaine Fosler — Milford Historical Society

Frank Harding — Hooker County Historical Society

Frank Tolstedt — Carnegie Art Center

Franklin County Historical Society Board of Directors — Franklin County Historical Society

Gloria Hilton — Faling Living History Tour Home

Harlan Seyfer — Plattsmouth Main St. Association

Jan Eloise Morris — City of Blue Springs

Jan Wright — Brownville Fine Arts Association

Jane Brewster — Butte Community Historical Museum

Jane Monson — Dundy County Historical Society

Janey Williams Rudder — Great Plains Welsh Heritage Project

Janice K. Schiefert — Saunders County Historical Society

Jean Johnson — The Durham Museum

Jeanne Ross — Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA)

Jerry Kneifel — Platte County Historical Society

Judith Rada — Saline County Historical Society and Museum

Kathy Spotanski — Sherman County Historical Society

Ken Tracy — The Archway

Kim Vrtiska — Table Rock Historical Society

Lloyd & Betty Brichacek — Schuyler/Colfax County Museum

Margaret Lutton — Willow Point Gallery and Museum

Mary Dana Loring — Trinity Episcopal Cathedral Historical Society

Mary T. Wagner — Pawnee County Promotional Network

Nona Wiese — Scribner Musbauch Museum

Pat McKenzie — Boys Town

Phyllis C. Krotz — The Armstrong House Museum-Sheridan County Historical Society

Robert and Terry Drake — Comstock Community

Rosalie McKnight — Custer County Historical Society

Susan Juza — Fort Atkinson

Susan Rice — Cass County Historical Society

Tammy and Larry Paulsen — Robert Henri Museum and Art Gallery

Tomàs England — Front Street Cowboy Museum

Vicki Vannier — Wheeler Co. Historical Museum

Wendell Upright — Keith County Historical Society

Yvonne Dalluge — Pawnee City Historical Society